European forest city award 2019 to the city of Aberdeen

Dear Lord Provost of Aberdeen, Mr. Barney Crockett, Director of James Hutton Institute Professor Colin Campbell, Dear colleagues,

As Director of the European Forest Institute it is a great pleasure to be here with all of you today to give the European Forest City Award 2019 to the city of Aberdeen! An award that cities like Bilbao, St Petersburg, Vienna and Oslo have received in previous years. An award that was established to recognize those cities committed to forests and trees as well as to forest research and education. Aberdeen deserves this award for many different reasons, but let me briefly highlight three of them:

First and most obvious because of the city relationship with forests and trees. The four great forests around Aberdeen provide crucial environmental, social and economic benefits to its citizens. In addition, the city council has taken important actions regarding the tree coverage of the city; maintaining existing trees and plating new trees, for instance within the project "a tree for every citizen".

A second reason is the visionary and ambitious **Nature Conservation Strategy of the city! Such Strategy is in my view very unique as it places** nature at the heart of the city´s sustainable development.

Third reason is that Aberdeen is a recognized forestry knowledge centre in Europe thanks not only to its University but also to the **James Hutton Institute**, which in my view is a very good example of how a modern transdisciplinary research organization can produce transformative science as a basis for the sustainable use of land and natural resources.

But the European Forest City Award was also established to rise societal awareness on the importance of forests for sustainable cities. Let me share a few reflections on why that is so important.

For the first time in history more than half of the global population live in cities. Cities are our main economic and innovation hubs, producing 80% of the global GDP, and they are also responsible for more than 2/3ds of the energy consumption and carbon emissions. This importance will only increase in the future as we are experiencing an urbanization rate equivalent to 200,000 additional people each day. This means that by 2050 there will more than 2/3 of the global population living in urban areas. Which also explains why we still need to build 50% of the urban fabric required by then!

Therefore, in the future, cities face a gigantic challenge, and forests can be instrumental in meeting that. **First, cities will need to take a leading role in addressing climate change and other environmental problems**. **Second, cities will need to provide new and sustainable infrastructures and housing for the growing urban population.** Meeting both challenges means rethinking not only the energy model but also the materials used in our urban fabric as well as the role of green infrastructures in cities.

Doing that is not going to be an easy task. Just consider the building construction sector! At European level the construction of buildings represents 35% of the carbon emissions, 40% of

the energy consumption, 50% of all materials used and 30% of the waste generated. Substantial impacts! Impacts that are explained due to the materials we are using. Two non-renewable materials dominate the sector: steel and concrete. Producing them is not environmentally friendly, and globally they are responsible for more than 10% of the global carbon emissions. Producing 1Tn of steel releases an average of 1.7 Tn of CO2 while producing 1Tn of cement, a key ingredient of concrete, releases 1Tn of CO2.

What can our forests offer to change the situation? **Our forests offer wood, which is the only significant construction material that is renewable and can be grown sustainably. Using wood is one of the most effective ways we have to fix carbon and store it for long periods of time (it is one of the best carbon capture technologies we have).** By using 1M3 of wood products in construction we are storing 1Tn of CO2. The good news is that we are experiencing a revolution in building with wood and no technical limitations exist compare building with steel and concrete. Therefore, using wood is one of the most effective ways we have to reduce the carbon footprint in our urban areas. And it's not only building with wood. Using urban forests and placing trees strategically located around buildings we can reduce energy consumption for heating and cooling by around 20-40% depending on the situation as well as substantially reducing the urban heat island effect.

This is why forests, trees and wood are called to become the backbone for sustainable cities in the future. Because in addition to their health and recreational aspects, our forests will be crucial infrastructures to develop climate smart cities.

In a digital era, when cities are investing heavily in sophisticated technologies and digitalization, we should remember that nature is the ultimate sophistication.

As Brian Arthur, an Innovation Economist said: "We, humans place our deepest hopes in technology but still our deepest trust in nature".

Congratulations to the City of Aberdeen for the European Forest City Award 2019!